

A Note on Some Jewish Assimilationists: The Angels (P. Berlin 5025b, P. Louvre 2391)

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Professor Bickerman's particular interest in relations between Jews and gentiles as a continuing theme in Jewish history makes it seem appropriate to dedicate to his memory this note on a minority group of Jewish immigrants who entered Europe from the Near East about the beginning of the present era, prospered mightily, after their (probably involuntary) conversion to Christianity, became an important part of the ruling class, and in many cases assimilated with, in others reportedly drove out, the earlier inhabitants of their own sort (this in spite of the fact that they also remained active in Jewish affairs). I refer to the angels.

That they were originally a Jewish family—or even a family at all—is disputed. Certainly they had close relatives in Palmyra and elsewhere along the Palestine-Syrian coast, where their name can be traced back to the bronze age. It was originally *malʿak*, a functional name meaning ‘envoy’ or, by extension, ‘agent’. In early times it seems to have been used for any men or deities, or even animals, who ran errands for their superiors. This was true also of its Greek (not quite) equivalent, *angelos*, ‘messenger’, which in hellenistic times, if not before, became its common translation. By Roman imperial times, however, the trade union was well on towards becoming a family group. When writers of the Antonine period and later speak of “the angels” they usually mean a special class of beings, commonly conceived as a sort of racial group distinct from the other groups of the (usually) invisible population—the gods, ghosts, demons, etc.

To trace the stages—let alone the causes—of this transition would be a task far too complex for the present paper. Here we shall focus on one small stage of the process, a stage documented by two invocations in the magical papyri, one which I shall call L, in P. Louvre 2391,¹ the other, B, in P. Berlin 5025b.² In both papyri these have been run together with other metrical passages and therefore have not, so far as I know, been

¹ Lines 211–24, according to the numeration of K. Preisendanz, *Papyri graecae magicae*², ed. A. Henrichs (Stuttgart, 1973–74, 2 v.; henceforth P), in which P. Louvre 2391 is no. III, often called P. Mimaut; its fragments have been arranged and its lines numbered in various ways by various editors, see the table by G. Moeller in P, I.32f.

² P no. 1, lines 300–305.

considered separately, in spite of their differences from their contexts. L follows a hymn to the sun (who is addressed as 'Titan') and is followed—after two lines of uncertain content—by a conjuration of some single individual; the purpose of the conjuration is not stated. B follows a brief invocation of the Pythian Apollo, and is immediately followed by a conjuration related to that in L. Here, too, the conjuration has no stated purpose and no apparent connexion with the invocation of the angels. The similar arrangement in both papyri of two apparently unrelated pieces of material suggests that both papyri used some smaller collection, which apparently existed in widely different forms, evidence of rather long descent from its original, but this is a side road we cannot follow.

Both L and P have been reprinted as verse, along with their quasi metrical contexts, in the appendix to P. The versions given there are based on the observations and conjectures of many scholars who have tried to make sense and hexameters of the letters in the papyri.³ Let us suppose the results of their scholarship approximately correct. If so, those elements of the content which will concern us are mostly reliable. Serious uncertainty about them occurs only in the case of L, about the preserved initial of the lost name at the end of line 2, and about considerable elements in lines 4, 5, 7, and 13. We may put these problems aside till we come to them, and may here pass over the general questions of palaeography, wording, and grammar (which have hitherto had most attention) so as to come to those of composition and content (hitherto comparatively neglected). The two texts, as printed in the appendix to P, read as follows:⁴

- B: ἄγγελε πρῶτε θεοῦ, Ζηνὸς μεγάλοιο, Ἰάω,
καὶ σὲ τὸν οὐράνιον κόσμον κατέχοντα, Μιχαήλ,
καὶ σὲ καλῶ, Γαβριήλ, πρωτάγγελε, δεῦρ' ἀπ' Ὀλύμπου,
ἀντολιῆς Ἀβρααῆς κεχαρημένος, Ἰλαος ἔλθοις,
5 ὃς δούειν ἀντολίηθεν ἐπισκοπιάζῃ, Ἄδωναί.
πᾶσα φύσις τρομέει σε, πάτερ κόσμοιο, Πακερβήθ.
- L: κλήζω πρῶτο[ν τ]ὸν Διὸς ἄγγελον, θε<ι>ον Ἰάω,
καὶ σε τὸν οὐράνιον κόσμον κατέχοντα, Ρ[αφαήλ,
ἀντολιῆς χαίρ[ω]ν, θεὸς Ἰλαος ἔσ<σ>ο, Ἀβρασαῆξ,
καὶ σε, μέγιστε <καί> αἰθέριε, κλήζω {α[ρ]ωγον σου} <σε> Μ[ιχαήλ],
5 καὶ σώζοντα βί[ου]ς ἰδίφ<ν>, Δι[ὸς] ὄμμα τέλειον,
καὶ φύσιν ἀέξοντα καὶ ἐκ φύσεως φύσιν ἀ[ύ]θις,
καὶ κλήζω ἀθανάτων [.....] σεσε[νγενβ]αρφαραγγῆς
παντοκράτωρ θεὸς ἔσσι, σὺ δ', ἀθάνατ', ἔσσι μέγιστος.
ἴκνοῦμαι νῦν λάμπων, ἄναξ κόσμοιο Σα[βαώθ],
10 ὃς δούειν ἀντολίησιν ἐπισκεπάζε<ι>ς, Ἄδωνα[ι],
κόσμος ἐὼν κόσμον μόνος ἀθανάτων ἐ[φοδε]ύεις,

3 Notably: G. Parthey, *Zwei griechische Zauberpapyri des Berliner Museums*, Berlin, 1865 (= *Abhdl.* Berlin, 1865), 109-49; E. Abel, *Orphica* (Leipzig, 1885), 286; L. Fahz, "Ein neues Stück Zauberpapyrus," *ARW* 15 (1912), 409-21; S. Eitrem, *Les Papyrus magiques grecs de Paris* (Kristiana, 1923 = *VSK Skrifter* II.1); K. Preisendanz, P; E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der röm. Kaiserzeit* (Göttingen, 1926 = *Abhdl.* Gött., 3 Folge, 49). Further bibliography in P.

4 B = II.262, no. 23, lines 3-8; L = II.241f., no. 5, lines 14-26, a reprint of Heitsch, LX.5, lines 14-26. The apparatus given by Preisendanz and Heitsch do not suffice for accurate determination of the texts of the papyri, nor for a history of the proposed emendations; hence it does not seem worthwhile to reprint them here.

αὐτομαθῆς, ἀδίδακτος, μέσον <τὸν> κόσμον ἐλ[αύνων
(?)τῆ[ς] νυκτὸς <κ>αιρὸς ἰδὲ ἠοῦς, Ἀκραμμαχ[άρι]

From this juxtaposition it is clear that we have two versions of an original invocation of five angels. Lines 1 and 2 of both are obvious variants; line 3 of B is probably a remote variant of line 4 of L (see below); line 4 of B and line 3 of L are variants; so are lines 5 of B and 10 of L. These are the only lines of which variants appear in both texts, and in four cases of five they invoke the same angels: Iao, Michael, Abrasax, and Adonai. Except for one inversion, the lines occur in the same order in both texts. No angel, save those attached to matching lines, appears in both texts; with two exceptions, no pair of lines occurs save with identical angels. A clearer case of common source and independent developments could hardly be found.

The Michael-Raphael-Gabriel exchange is puzzling, the more so because doubt as to the name in line L2 (where the letter read above as initial *R* has also been read as *M*) and serious corruption in L4 make the wording uncertain. That the line of which B3 and L4 are different descendants was part of the original seems likely because the verb in it is essential for B. That B 1 and 2 and L 1 and 2 were in the original is clear from their similarity. The angel invoked in B2 was probably at first Michael because the function specified—maintaining order in heaven—is one appropriate to him,⁵ not to Raphael, a doctor, as his name declares. One may guess that Raphael was introduced because of the importance of cures to the magicians who used these texts. If so, the fact that he had to be introduced will indicate that the spell did not originate in medical magic, but was later adapted to it. With the introduction of Raphael (and into second place!) Michael was shifted to the end of L4, displacing Gabriel, his less colorful second in command.⁶ The original list will have been Iao, Michael, Gabriel, Abrasax, Adonai—an all-Jewish team (if one accept Barb's derivation of Abrasax from ³*arba*^c)⁷ and probably a charm for warriors, given the prominence of Michael and Gabriel. (Iao, of course, was a warrior from of old, cf. Ps. 24.)

Barb's argument, however, would also persuade us that Abrasax was *YHWH*, the god of the tetragrammaton, whose sacred number was four,⁸ whose throne was borne by four holy beasts and attended by four archangels. The god and the four angels would make five, but here we have five angels, all of them presumably servants of Zeus, who is "god." Admittedly, the pentagram was occasionally used by Jews in antiquity, perhaps as an apotropaic symbol. However, the number five had strong ties with paganism.⁹ So do the angels of this text: Iao appears as an angel of Zeus; Gabriel is called from Olympus. The original text was probably written by a completely assimilated Jew who invoked these Jewish angels as powerful, albeit subordinate, members of the imaginary supernatural society.

Perhaps the original text had a conclusion now lost. To take *Adonai* as the final word leaves things in the air. Indeed, it is so unsatisfactory that the strongest reason for

5 W. Lueken, *Michael* (Göttingen, 1898), 22ff. For Michael's cosmic rule see I Enoch 69.14ff.; he is regularly "the chief commander" of the heavenly armies, *Tosefta Hullin* 2.18, etc., anticipated in Dan. 12.1.

6 Lueken, *Michael*, 32ff.

7 A. Barb, "Abraxas Studien," in *Hommages à W. Deonna*, *Latomus* 28 (1957), 67ff.

8 Barb, *Latomus* 28.81ff.

9 J. Schouten, *The Pentagram as a Medical Symbol* (Nieuwkoop, 1968), 19–27.

thinking it the end of the original is that both independent developments left the original here. The original may have intended them to leave. Many spells simply provide the power—the magic words, the invocation that will call up the spirit—and then leave it to the magician to use the power as he wishes.

That the last line of B is a later addition is argued not only by its absence from L, but also by the fact that *Pakerbeth* is not a Jewish angel but a fusion of words from a formulaic invocation of the Egyptian god Seth, another power generally useful for destruction. The whole formula is described in P XIVc.21 as his “authentic” name, and the word here taken from it may stand as *pars pro toto* for the whole, thus adding Seth, who was often identified with Iao, to this list of Iao and his affiliates. Alternatively, *Pakerbeth* may have been used here, as Bonner claims it often was,¹⁰ merely as a ‘word of power’, a sort of ‘Amen’ to validate the preceding invocation (of which the clause ending, “father of the world,” would then refer to *Adonai*). A further consideration is the fact that addition of *Pakerbeth* as an angel’s name would produce a list of six names, and six, falling between Greek five and Hebrew seven, was comparatively neglected in magic.¹¹ Given these contrary considerations, the question must be left open, though the prior structure of the invocation—one line per angel—argues strongly for the supposition that the word is here used as a name. So much for B.

The development of L is more uncertain because of the uncertainty of its text. “Perfect eye of Zeus” is a brilliant conjecture—it has the brilliance of thin ice. *Sesengenbarpharanges* is perhaps a marginal gloss¹² and certainly hard to adapt to the meter. *Pantokrator* may be either an epithet or the name of an angel; in magical usage the word was in the tadpole stage. That it was placed at the beginning of the line, while most angelic names come at the ends, may indicate that it was to be read as an epithet of the angel whose lost name preceded it. On the other hand, its Hebrew equivalent, *Sabaoth*,¹³ is almost certainly here the name of another angel. Though in the Old Testament it was merely an epithet of *YHWH*, in magical texts it commonly refers to an independent god.¹⁴ This argues that *Pantokrator*, too, should be taken as a noun. So does the prior structure of the invocation.¹⁵ After *Sabaoth*, however, the one-line-per-angel structure seems to be abandoned and the “who” of line 10 appears to be carrying the sentence on. But this appearance is misleading. Comparison with B shows that we now return to the original text and that the “who” should be taken as an anticipatory reference to *Adonia* (“<And thou> who . . . , <O> *Adonai*”), here a second vocative after “shine forth.” Consequently *Adonai* should be followed by a period. Lines 11–13

10 C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets* (Ann Arbor, 1950 = *U. of Mich. Studies, Humanistic Series*, 49), 163f.

11 The unpublished index of P lists 32 uses of *pente*, 24 of *hex*, and 99 of *hepta*. These figures include both names and numerals, and also uses in compounds, except in other numbers (thus *pentegrammaton*, but not *dekapente*). My single count of the passages cited in Preisendanz’ lists may be somewhat off, but hardly enough to misrepresent the relative infrequency of *hex*.

12 P on III.217, “von εεεε an auf den Rand geschrieben,” is not clear about this.

13 *Pantokrator* is the regular translation of Hebrew *Šeba’ot*, see Hatch and Redpath, s.v.

14 This will be shown fully by the forthcoming *index verborum* to the translation of the magical papyri (ed. H. D. Betz, U. of Chicago Press, 1986).

15 The proposal of E. Heitsch, “Drei Helioshymnen,” *Hermes* 88 (1960), 154f., to read the names as various epithets for one solar deity, founders on the undoubted distinction of the figures in the original text.

(which indisputably break the structure, as did lines 5–7) would seem by analogy to lead to *Akrammachari* as the name of a final angel. However, this name is a variant of *Akrammachamari*, which has been convincingly explained by Scholem as an imperative, “uproot the spells.”¹⁶ This imperative makes good sense as a conclusion for the invocation, and it accords with the introduction of Raphael, as part of a remodelling of the invocation for medical purposes. To take it as an angel’s name would leave the invocation without any point, another example of the type mentioned above (on *Adonai*). But the interpolator—if his work is rightly restored—did not even know how to spell the word he introduced, so he may be suspected of ignoring its semitic meaning and of thinking it merely a name; it is often used by itself as if it were one. *Sesengenbarpharanges*, although marginal, was probably intended to replace or identify some name in the text. If we take it, *Pantokrator*, and *Akrammachamari* as names, we have nine angels, the number of the holy Egyptian ennead. But the ogdoad and the hebdomad were hardly less holy, so numerology, as often, leaves us a free field for choice.

More significant is the fact that all the names added in this expanded text come from the same Jewish magical background as do those of the original text, so the expansion, as well as the original composition, probably went on in circles either Jewish or in close touch with Judaism. Yet the identification of Iao as “angel of Zeus” was not eliminated, and “eye of Zeus”—if correctly discerned—appears as a new pagan epithet. The angels now have active roles in physical creation (line 6), they are also rulers of the world (8), drive it and oversee it (10–12), as do the visible gods (the planets) of Platonism. This anticipates the Palestinian synagogue mosaics with the angel of the sun in their centers, and the other material, both Jewish and Christian, that indicates Jewish worship of angels.¹⁷ The pagans may have learned angelolatry, as well as monotheism, from Jews as well as Christians.

Finally, dates: P. Berlin 5025 was written about A.D. 400, P. Louvre 2391 about 300 or a bit later. Both are probably copies of earlier texts like themselves. Those texts (or their ultimate ancestors) had been put together from smaller collections which, before being thus used, had diverged widely and independently from their originals. Such divergence implies a manuscript history of several generations. The invocation which the original collection contained was hardly written by the collector; it differs too markedly from the other elements. Before incorporation into the collection it presumably had a history of its own. The steps from the present manuscripts back to their archetypes, and from the archetypes back to the collections they used, and from the two different collections back to their common original, and from that original back to the first form of the included invocation, could perhaps be squeezed into a couple of centuries, but, given the wide divergence of the preserved texts, might reasonably be thought to have taken longer.

The fact that not only the original, but also its major expansion in L, are entirely Jewish in nomenclature, argues for a date before the near-extirmination of the Egyptian Jews in 115–17. After that, indeed, Jewish material survived in manuscripts and

16 G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*² (New York, 1965), 97.

17 M. Smith, “Helios in Palestine,” *Eretz-Israel* (Orlinsky vol.) 16 (1982), 199*–214*, esp. 209f.

undeniably continued to be used, but one would expect, when a text was being expanded, some admixture of pagan personnel. A first century A.D. date would be more likely, but perhaps, for the sociological background, one should go back to a yet earlier time, when Jewish warriors needed such spells, and when the picture of Jewish angels in the service of Zeus could be modelled on the sight of Jewish generals in the service of the Ptolemies (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 13.354). This would put us in the first two thirds of the first century B.C., roughly 350 years before the writing of P. Louvre 2391. Is this too large a gap? I think not. Many manuscripts written as late as A.D. 1500 contain texts of "the Lord's prayer."